

Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday morning 14 July 1929

PSALM 27 verses 8 and 9

"When Thou saidst 'Seek ye My face' my heart  
said unto Thee 'Thy face Lord will I seek; Hide not  
Thy face from me; put not thy servant away in  
anger; Thou hast been my help; leave me not,  
neither forsake me, O God of my salvation'"

"When Thou saidst 'seek ye My face'" In this word there is a very great principle, although the word itself is expressive of a personal experience of things. In the words there is a great principle, and that principle is this, that God is first in the matter of salvation. "When Thou saidst", not until. Men who seek the Lord truly have been the subjects of communications from Him. It is a great principle, it is a merciful principle, a truth for which every child of God, in due time, will bless the Lord, for had not God prevented us with His mercy, had He not come to us and caused us to seek Him, there never would have been any seeking of His face. Also there is this, that the great God should condescend to allow Himself to be sought unto; that He should make Himself seekable and findable; that ever, in this sin-cursed world, He should have made it known in the Scriptures and in the hearts of some men, that He is, although a sin-hating God by nature, a sinner saving, sin pardoning, approachable God in Christ.

Let us for a few moments first of all look at this great point. "When Thou saidst". And your minds, who fear God and seek His face, will go back, naturally go back to a time, a period, it may be to a place, "When Thou saidst", not in word necessarily, but in power; when there was a communication from heaven that affected you, affected you in your heart, in your conscience, that caused you in some degree to know that God saw you, that God hated sin, that you were a sinner, that you needed something that you never knew you needed before, a Saviour, a

refuge, a hiding place; deliverance from condemnation, death and hell. Various degrees of this are experienced, truly experienced by the people of God, whereby they become the people of God. The whole of the household of faith, the brethren who are the children of God, are subject to a divine call. We hear little about this today; in some mysterious manner people obtain religion. There are creeds, more or less correct, according to a rational judgment, imbibed in the judgment, and that is a very solemn thing, when men imbibe such creeds in their judgment and turn to religion by their natural reason. It does not matter what kind of religion men turn to, if they turn to it themselves and God has nothing to do with it, it wont end well. A terrible thing to consider this - "Ye must be born again". It would be well for us all closely to look into this great point, as God may give us honest hearts and consciences, in the fear of His Name and in appreciation of the importance of the matter, and the value of our souls. Are we born again? There must be a knowledge of this, where it is. When the heart and conscience are made honest, there must be a knowledge whether or no there have been communications to your soul, an effect wrought in your heart that nature could not work, that made a tremendous change in your outlook respecting time, eternity, yourself and God. It is not for me to lay down any method in which the Lord should work, but certainly, according to the Scripture, not one Scripture only, but the Scripture generally, God does show to men, in a measure, a measure sufficient to make them need salvation, their state by nature.

"When Thou saidst". Where were you when the Lord first, in your heart, said this; when He condemned your rebellious, wild, worldly spirit by implanting grace in your heart; made you to feel to be in want, in want of God, in want of a portion for your souls, in want of salvation, of a refuge from the wrath to come. Can you think of the place, the time, when light divine shone into your heart and showed you things that you knew not before? Even though you may say that you saw them dimly, you saw them, and the sight affected your heart. "When Thou saidst 'Seek ye My face'". And when God does that in a people and causes them to

know that without Him they are without hope in the world and for eternity, it is a very great blessing. And when, after perhaps a long time of bondage and fear, the Lord graciously draws a sinner, by His grace with encouragement, to seek His face, his heart is greatly affected with that, as well as his will. True religion is heart work, and the will is regulated from the heart. If God takes your heart, affects it with His divine teaching and grace, you will be influenced, and so here this good man said "My heart said unto Thee, 'Thy face Lord will I seek'". A willingness to seek the Lord, to turn away from self, from the world, from sinful sweets, from ambitions, from everything that is not related to your soul's good and God's glory. To be compelled, to be enabled, to be inclined in your heart and will to thus seek the Lord, is an evidence of God's grace toward a sinner. My heart replied. Whatever your heart says to God as under the teaching of the Holy Ghost and in a way of salvation, will be a response to what He says to you, because unless the Lord speaks, or influences, or shines, or directs, or moves in the heart, we are just motionless; we can never rise, can never go in the right direction. And when our hearts are not under the power of grace, then our wills are unruly. Therefore it is a great thing to have your heart so affected as that your will is inclined Godward. The will partakes of the depravity of our nature as well as other faculties of our persons and it is a great thing because the will and the affections are so united as that if the heart is wrong the will must be wrong. If the heart is right, the will cannot be wrong. "My heart said unto Thee, 'Thy face Lord will I seek'". And it also discloses this, that together with the heart and the will, there was some understanding in the man, some understanding of the profit and goodness and wisdom of seeking, according to divine intimation, the face of the Lord.

And this brings me to notice next what is intended by the term "Seek ye My face". God accommodates Himself in His infinite condescension to terms understandable in our language and, although properly speaking, no natural terms can really declare God, yet it is a great mercy and an amazement to the sinner who

is led to see it, how God does, in the Holy Scripture, continually, as it were, accommodate Himself to our language, to make Himself manifest; not that the Scriptures alone will do it as merely in the printing of these words, but the truths that are contained in our language, as brought into the heart by the Holy Ghost, they declare God, the truths respecting God. "Thy face". By the face of a person we obtain indication of their mind, their heart, their attitude. And God, in the law, has a frown, yea, more than a frown, He has anger. And therefore, in the law, God is forbidding, not attractive to a sinner. A sinner, naturally, under the law, turns from God; he cannot face Him, dreads the thought of seeing God. Just as the Israelites trembled, and Moses with them, when God shone from Sinai, so truly, in the heart, a sinner convicted, trembles at the thought of seeing God. But God has a face, that is He has a countenance, which is to a sinner full of invitation, full of goodness, and mercy and love and kindness and pardon. His glory in the Lord Jesus is the face of God, the face of a reconciled God, a smiling God, a God who, while hating sin, can smile upon a poor, repentant sinner; while necessarily hating and punishing sin, can spare a hell-deserving sinner; while necessarily banishing from Himself those who die in their sins, can invite and receive and bless polluted sinners who mourn their pollution. "Seek ye My face". "My heart said unto Thee, 'Thy face Lord will I seek'". And it expresses this, the desire of the heart, the design of the will, the concurrence of the understanding in going out after intimacy with the Lord Jesus and God in Him. Peace, reconciliation, love, nothing between you. When you are with a friend who is honest and faithful, you can detect usually from their manner, or from their countenance, if there is a ruffle, if there is anything of the shadow of a cloud. That of course is very imperfect, but this that thus is expressed of God and of the desire and of the will of this good man is, in the fulness of it, an absolute, a complete, seeing of God's face as it can be borne, with nothing between, no cloud, no fury, no remembering of sin, no rebuke, no curse. O my friends, is this what your will says, what your heart says, what your understanding says, what your desires go after? "Thy face will I seek". This gives to a man in religion

a direction, an aim, an object, a centre, a goal. They have something that they want, cannot rest without obtaining what they want any more than could the prodigal rest until he was in the Father's house. And what the Holy Ghost does in people does produce in them distinct points, does cause them to have real aims. It is not just a passing thought here and there, but true life and, from time to time, more or less felt, this is the direction, the leaning, the bent, the will, the desire, the longing of the heart, caused by God to seek Him. "When Thou saidst 'Seek ye My face'". And therefore those of you who are under this influence, and who have set before your eyes, in your heart, that which is above and through and beyond all circumstances that may move you here and there and which even goes through all lapses and rises again by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, so as that through your lives, this is the direction - the face of God, the mercy and goodness and love and smile and blessing of God, you have a great deal to be thankful for. Even although you may say, many of you, I have never yet had a satisfying visit; I have never yet seen the Lord and felt sweet union with Him, do not say the Lord has done nothing if He has put this great aim and principle into your heart and life. But according to these words that I have read for a text and according to the true experience of the saints in all ages, it is not in practice and experience easy to get a clear view of the Lord, to obtain His smile and to get satisfaction for those desires of your heart. Many things will be against a man who is seeking God. And this is a trouble to him for the reason that he is truly seeking God. If the seeking is but a sham, the lack of finding will not be a trouble. If the Lord has quickened you, made His smile, His love, His mercy, His pardon, His presence, necessary to you, you cannot fail of being troubled as you are withstood and obstructed by many, many things in your search after the Lord. But the Psalmist took the course that every child of God is compelled to take as seeking His face; he prayed that the Lord would not hide His face from him, which expresses several things. First of all, that the man believed that God, whom he sought, could, if He would, remove every obstacle, dispel every cloud, take away all distance and bring about the desired

hour. "Hide not Thy face far from me". If this man was honest in his prayer, he was a man who, though in heart and will was seeking the Lord, did not, seeking, find it easy. Do you find it easy? Do you find it a simple matter? Can you enter into truth as and when you will, and be satisfied as and when you will? Do you find reasons, causes in yourselves, and in your lives, and in respect of the world and the devil, why the Lord is not found satisfactorily, why He should hide Himself far from you? Seeking souls are not innocent souls; seeking souls are not blameless souls; they are sinners who seek the Lord, none others. They do not boast of their sins and in their shame, but O, while seeking Him, how often they are turned aside, tripped up, defiled with fresh guilt. How often they find themselves weakened and impoverished, and all the little strength and determination that they felt seems to be gone, through sin. Men who are seeking the Lord, know something about sin, and what it can do. Men who are not seeking the Lord, who are satisfied with religion, are not the subjects of these changes. Ah, my friends, you may, on one occasion feel so as if you could hear the Lord's goings, as if you were so near to Him that you anticipated that blessed hour arriving, and then, while full of anticipation and desire, something in your thoughts, something in your spirit, something provoking from without, some loud, idle word will just weaken you, remove the anticipation, bondage your spirit, and you will be laid low again in the billows and waves of trouble. Fears are like great mountains of waves through sin, and the poor sinner feels that even his approaching to what he hoped he was going to get, that that anticipation of the blessed hour, adds trouble to his present guilt, and it seems as though he must start over again. He is tempted to give it up, to call no more on Jesus' Name, to lie down and leave all this seeking alone; this labouring he must give up, his strength is gone. He is disappointed, dejected, and the devil tempts him that he ought to just give it all up, but he cannot. This man could not, but he took a course, the only course that a child of God can take, and that only as helped by the renewing of the Spirit - he prayed - "Hide not Thy face far from me". "Lord do not let this guilt remain; do not let this weakness remain; let me have a clearing

of this. Let this new weakness that has come upon me be removed by grace. O restore me. Do not hide Thy face from me. You may read the Scriptures, some of you, and see how that God says "If a man return to the Lord, the Lord will return to him" and you may say "Well I have sought the Lord but I have not found Him. I think I have sought Him earnestly and sincerely, but I am not satisfied; he does not come to me. And it may be that at times there is a movement of self-pity, rebellion, with unbelief, in you. That only makes matters worse. If you say, because you have sought the Lord, therefore the Lord ought to bless you, therefore you have made the Lord your debtor, and that He owes you a visit and a blessing, that is rebellion; that is unbelief. And so you learn, learn what sin can do, not because the Scriptures say "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God", but because you know it, and knowing it and feeling it, and yet wanting the Lord, you are caused to pray, "Hide not Thy face far from me". If God should hide His gospel, if He should bring a cloud over your heart and over His truth, you could not see it, however clearly you might know the truth in your judgment. And I believe that if we are made discerning in this matter, we shall discern between true religion and false religion. Here men who have no life in their souls can usually go on and hold fast to a confidence that is not good. Men who have a vital religion, in whom there is the Holy Ghost, prove continually that what the Lord gives them they gather; what He reveals they see, and if He hides Himself they cannot behold Him. You have that in Job, a very important and discriminating word "When He giveth quietness who then can make trouble." You know none can make trouble when the Lord is with you. That is the quietness that is intended there according to the next word. "When He hideth His face, who then can behold Him". Yet what there is in us that we perceive merits His hiding His face. So we are compelled again and again to come down to the grace of God and to go on the terms of grace alone to Him for this; not because we have sought Him; not because even we trust we are born again, but simply on the ground of free grace, simply upon the ground that the Lord has said that He will forgive confessing sinners and not remember their iniquities against them. We have

to pray in that way while we are seeking for satisfaction, and so the heart lives. "Your heart shall live that seek the Lord". Oh it is a life; a life of changes; a life of hunger and what Rutherford says may be in some small measure understood at times - "The Lord makes his people fat with desertion, and feeds them with tears." "Hide not Thy face far from me". Such people cannot live satisfied formalists. Such people cannot have the creed of the gospel in their judgment and never feel any change in their hearts. They know the difference between night and day; between sunshine and cloud. Do you know the difference sinner, professor? Has the Lord given you to know the difference? 'Tis a great thing. O it is not by any means every professor that has great knowledge of the truth in the doctrine of it, that can tell you out of an honest heart, that he knows when the sun shines. "Hide not Thy face far from me. Put not Thy servant away in anger", which seems to be something further than hiding His face, and this is feared by a seeking soul, not only fearing that you are following the Lord and He is hiding Himself from you, but even the issue of things, that He will not only hide Himself, but put you away, and that in anger. If the Lord should remove His Spirit and grace from any man, that man would no longer seek Him and that is virtually putting him away. The Lord never takes His Spirit finally from His own people, but there are some solemn cases in the Scriptures of men who had some things which were taken away. Saul had some things, King Saul. The Lord took His mercy away from him. He had the Spirit as a spirit of prophesy. He was among the prophets. God's Spirit was taken from him as to any saving, gracious operations, and how solemnly the Lord Jesus speaks in the gospel. Says He - "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness". And again He says "He that hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have". Are not some such Scriptures very penetrating and solemn and yet salutary for us to observe. If you observe such words and see in them, as against the person's discredit, the anger of God, and seeing in yourself reasons why the Lord should be angry with you, there will be some work in your heart in deprecating this before God. "Hide not Thy face far from me; put not Thy servant away in anger." This is a real heart

experience. Have you had it over before God? Have you deprecated this before God fearing He would not let you come near nor approach Him at the throne of grace, nor ever satisfy you by smiling on you? But he had more; O David had something to look back upon and he made a good use of it by the Holy Ghost. May the Lord help us to do the same when we are in like circumstances. Said he "Thou hast been my help".

There is a right use of past experience and a wrong use of it. Left to ourselves we are apt to make a wrong use of it and that is to live upon it, to rest in it, which is very impoverishing to the soul, very weakening to faith, very dishonouring to the Lord. A right use of it as in the text is when you are in trouble to tell the Lord what He has done. It is like a man having a friend who seems somewhat displeased in some things and your going to that friend and reminding him of former days of intimacy, friendship, when he kindly came to your sustenance in certain troubles, and so in reverence, necessity, and by divine grace, the poor sinner is caused to go with that acknowledgement of what the Lord has done, and making what He has done a plea for present trouble. "Lord help me now for Thou hast been my help" Is not it a great thing to be able to say it. O sinner, cannot you remember when the Lord has been a help. Has He done nothing for you? Has He never blessed you, never looked upon you, never spoken to your heart, never granted you a little comfort of His love, never given you to hope in His mercy, which hope was very sweet to your soul, never given you to taste His grace, never given you in any way to see His beauty as revealed in the gospel. Has He never helped you? From what He has done you are warranted, according to the Scripture, in taking a plea; not an absolute plea, but a plea relating to His faithfulness, as much as to say - "Now Lord, Thou didst help me there, do help me again. And understanding will be moved in this; O sometimes in your understanding this will be moving in your heart too, the Lord is of one mind; He is faithful that has promised; He is not a man that He should lie. And you may be directed by the Holy Ghost, as indeed in the Scriptures people who are troubled are directed. "See My faithfulness; see what I have done.

Remember what Balaam and Balak did that ye may see the righteousness of the Lord. How Balak bid Balaam to curse the people God had blessed. And now it may be in your minds, now a Balak, a Balaam, a continual seeking to curse you, a seeking to find something, a ground for which God should cast you away, and you can find plenty. O, but when you are brought to the faithfulness and to the righteousness of the Lord, and to what He has done for you in the past, you get a hold of that truth, and you will make a plea of it "Thou hast been my help" Would He have done these things for you if He had not meant to bless you? Would He have taught you to fear His Name with a view to leaving you when you most need Him? Would He have taught you to seek His face, and then banish you from His presence, when His presence was so necessary, when the presence of your enemies made His presence so exceedingly necessary? What, a faithful God do this; far be it from Him. God forbid, says faith in the heart afresh. Faith says "I have not what I want, but Lord Thou didst help me in the past, now do help me now. Do manifest Thyself and shine upon me now. And I know this, that if you can but in this way observe and improve what God has done for you in the past, you will be greatly strengthened in your faith and fervent in your hope and steadied in your mind with respect to present troubles and after troubles. Thou hast been my help, is like a poor storm driven sinner leaning on the God who helped him in the past. "He who has helped me hitherto will help me all my journey through" says faith, and therefore I will ask Him to do it. You wont just sing that and go away and not call for the present help and manifestation of His love. You wont rest upon His faithfulness in that way, but you will go to the Lord and ask Him to help you, clear the whole matter and let you see His face and feel His love and have nothing between you and Himself.

I might speak of several helps that the people of God have. Some of you have had helps if not full deliverance. Others of you have had sweet deliverance in your souls. But whatever God has done for you, may the Lord help you to hold fast and see that thou magnify His work. I have found guilt and weakness induced in my own case by not observing, not remembering the work, the

blessings, the helps, the Lord has given me. You will find that if the Lord helps you when you are enabled to go to Him and thank Him for and acknowledge His goodness in helping you, you will be greatly strengthened, and the help will be a kind of double help. He will never be angry with you for venturing to tell Him what He has done for you, for venturing to tell Him and appeal to Him that in cases of trouble before He was your stay, your help, your support, your strength and your consolation and your deliverer. I can look back upon a few helps I trust, stones of help. It is good to lay up at times. "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps" says the Lord. "Turn again O virgin of Israel, by the way that thou wentest, turn again to these thy cities". The Lord is the same my friends, and if we seek unto Him, by the Holy Ghost in present troubles He will prove Himself a present help as in the past.

"Leave me not neither forsake me". This seems a strange addition to the petition. "Leave me not neither forsake me". Well the Lord has never forsaken His people, even when they are full of sin. It is written that Israel was never forsaken of his God though the land was full of sin. Does not the Lord reprove you when you sin? Does not He afflict your mind? Does not He convince you, does not He disturb you? Does not He afflict you by causing a cloud? Does not he pain you by giving you to see what you have done, what folly, what evil things you have entertained? O He does correct His people in love, and that proves He is with them. O professor, if you never get reproof for sin, if the Spirit never brings home to your conscience conviction, and never brings you with conviction to the throne of grace, in humble acknowledgment again and again, that looks very black for you; it looks as if the Spirit is not with you. But when the Spirit of God is with people, He does move, He does reprove of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. He does prompt to pray. O don't you find, poor people of God, in your difficult path, do not you find the Spirit prompting you to pray. Well says the Psalmist "Leave me not" without this conviction, without these promptings and without the truth as it is in the Scriptures being brought into my heart. "O take not the word of

truth utterly out of my mouth, leave me not utterly, forsake me not".

Well you may say, some of you, this seems a very poor line of things. Well, we are poor people some of us, but we seek a great God, we seek a city that hath foundations whose builder and Maker is God, and there is no comfort, no honourable quietness of conscience, no true rest of soul away from the Lord, when He hides His face, is there. May the Lord forbid ever we should rest without His presence, and enable us to seek His face continually.

AMEN.